



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Encouraged by reports indicating certain Alaskan waters had sufficient populations of King crabs to support an industry, two American firms are already in experimental operation, it was reported to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes today by R. H. Fiedler, Chief, Division of Fishery Industries, United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Our field work has only recently been completed," said Fiedler, referring to the Service's three-vessel expedition just returned from two seasons' explorations in the Bering Sea, "and the voluminous amount of data obtained has not as yet been assembled or analyzed.

"While the field parties are of the opinion that a commercial development is entirely possible, the majority of those interested in the development are awaiting our more detailed analysis of the data. However, two organizations which were already established in fishery operations in two localities investigated, and were able to observe our activities, are in process of putting up experimental packs this fall. One is a Seattle, one an Alaskan, firm. We do not expect any concerted effort with regard to the crab development until next year, however."

In past years, Japanese packers have conducted a fishery for these marine monsters, many of which weigh over 20 pounds, off the Asiatic coast

and near Alaska. United States firms, however, have not exploited a similar American fishery. This has been due principally to lack of adequate information regarding the areas in which the crabs congregated, their abundance, movement, or methods by which they could be caught in commercial quantities.

"It is believed," Fiedler explained, "that there might be some misconception as to the size of the crabs taken by the Japanese, since from actual data which have come to our attention it is doubtful whether the Japanese catch of crabs averages as large in size as those taken by our expedition.

"The Japanese have been fishing commercially, while we were fishing experimentally and were making no attempt to restrict our catches to all large crabs, as the catch was marked and returned to the water. We were interested in obtaining biological data on crabs of all sizes. The largest specimen taken by us weighed 23 pounds."

During the first portion of the venture, an attempt was made to fish thoroughly only the places where crabs were located in significant quantities. For the second voyage out, on the other hand, which set forth in February of this year, an attempt was made to cover as much territory as possible in order to determine the extent of the distribution of the Alaskan King crab populations. Consequently, the vessels have been leaving large bodies of the crustacean as soon as some idea of the productivity of a particular area had been obtained. By early July, over 13,000 crabs had been caught and marked or returned to the sea.

Besides obtaining information as to the location and distribution of King crabs in Alaskan waters, and the relative merit of various methods of fishing for them, considerable further biological data were also obtained on the second venture

regarding their life history and habits, essential factors in prosecuting a fishery on an intelligent basis.

A large number of crabs were measured and several thousand of these were tagged during the first and second expedition, and a number of tagged ones have been recovered. Thus new light has been thrown on their migratory movements and rate of growth.

A completed documentary record of the expedition has been scheduled for early in 1942.